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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000481

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR STAS FEDOROFF; U/S DOBRIANSKY; U/S HUGHES;
OES/AS McMURRY; NEA/AS WELCH; S/P FOR GORDON

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TAGS: PGOV ECON TNGD TPHY KISL SA

SUBJECT: VISIT OF STAS FEDEROFF TO KAUST GROUNDBREAKING
CEREMONY

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana C. Gfoeller for Reasons 1.4 (c) a
nd (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Science and Technology Adviser to the
Secretary attended the groundbreaking ceremony of the King

SIPDIS

Abdullah University for Science and Technology on October 21. The university is part of a development plan to also include a Petroleum Complex and King Abdullah Economic City, with the goal of linking industry, commerce, education, business and research. Research will focus on Energy and Environment, Bioscience and Bioengineering, Material Science and Engineering, and Applied Mathematics and Computational Science. Saudi Aramco will play a large role in the development of the coeducational school. Recruitment of future students is now under way internationally. END
SUMMARY.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

¶2. (U) Dr. Nina Federoff, the Science and Technology Adviser to Secretary Rice (STAS), accompanied by Jeddah Pol/Econ Chief, attended the groundbreaking ceremony of the King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) in Thuwal on October 21. The university, which has an expected completion date of 2009, will be a coeducational graduate-level research institution at an estimated cost of over twelve billion dollars. It will have one of the ten largest endowments in the world, worth more than ten billion dollars. The King's objective is to make the university a lighthouse of knowledge, to serve as a bridge between cultures and nations, and to help Saudi Arabia advance within the world in the fields of science and technology.

¶3. (U) The ceremony was attended by King Abdullah; Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz; Prince Miteb bin Abdulaziz, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs; Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, the Governor of Mecca; and many other princes, ministers and senior officials. The ceremony was also attended by foreign dignitaries and members of the diplomatic community, including Frances Townsend; Ambassador Ford Fraker; Ali Babacan, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs; Claude Gyan, Secretary General of France; and members of KAUST's International Advisory Council.

KING ABDULLAH'S DREAM

¶4. (U) The KAUST site encompasses 36 million square meters near Thuwal, a small fishing village located on the Red Sea approximately fifty miles north of Jeddah. The location was

selected as part of a large master development plan that will stretch from Thuwal to Rabigh and will include a Petroleum Complex (PetroRabigh), King Abdullah Economic City and KAUST. Once the area is developed, it will link industry, commerce, education, business and research.

¶15. (U) The King's dream is for the university to become a world-class institution, able to contribute to the global-research enterprise, with emphasis on four programs: Energy and Environment, Bioscience and Bioengineering, Material Science and Engineering, and Applied Mathematics and Computational Science. KAUST will have a faculty of the highest caliber, able to formulate value added research projects. English language will be the medium of instruction at the university, which will be modeled after institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Stanford University.

¶16. (U) The research agenda aims to accelerate scientific discovery and technological innovation. The strategy involves flexible funding, outreach to potential partner institutions, and targeted investments in physical and intellectual infrastructure in order to stimulate collaboration with research universities around the world, as well as the private sector. KAUST will also work with other universities in Saudi Arabia, including King Fahd University on Petroleum and Minerals, King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah and King Saud University in Riyadh. KAUST will be geared toward attracting the brightest students; its admissions requirements will be extremely high, and students will have to compete intensively to enter.

SAUDI ARAMCO'S ROLE

¶17. (U) The development of KAUST as an independent, high-quality research university has been tasked by the King
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to Saudi Aramco, the world's largest producer of petroleum. Aramco will provide leadership for the development of both the campus and the initial organizational and academic management. Aramco is supported by a distinguished International Advisory Council and a team of leading consultants in academic and research design and physical planning. The company was selected because it has a 75-year history of delivering results under the most difficult circumstances, and because it has extensive experience in the execution of mega-projects, training, and dealing with students.

RECRUITMENT OF STUDENTS

¶18. (U) KAUST has launched a Discovery Scholarship Program which focuses on undergraduate students outside the Kingdom in their second and third years of study, with the objective of having them join KAUST when it opens in 2009. Scholarships will be awarded to talented students at their current home institutions and will cover tuition, lodging and living stipends, books and computer allowances, and summer and career enrichment programs. Recruitment of scholarship recipients is now under way around the world.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

¶19. (U) Dr. Frank H.T. Rhodes, former President of Cornell University, addressed the audience at the ground breaking ceremony, noting that thanks to the partnerships that this new university will have, men and women will come here from across the world, men and women of all persuasions, all beliefs, and all faiths committed together to openness. Women at KAUST will share an equal role with men. They will be free to move around, drive, wear western clothes, and enjoy similar freedoms as men.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

¶10. (U) KAUST has three primary goals: forming a knowledge-based community, supporting scientists and their work at the national and international levels, and benefiting the community, region and the world through scientific research and economic development. KAUST will achieve these goals through partnerships and collaboration agreements with leading universities and research centers around the world. These partnerships will allow for the exchange of scientific expertise and knowledge, and create synergies and foster cooperation toward the advancement of scientific progress both in the Kingdom and throughout the world. KAUST has so far established partnerships with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI, Massachusetts), Institut Francais du Petrole (Paris), the National University of Singapore, the Indian Institute of Technology, and the American University in Cairo.

COMMENTS AND OPINIONS FROM EVENT ATTENDEES

¶11. (C) Some of the attendees, including some members of the University's International Advisory Council, were skeptical about the King's high expectations for KAUST. They commented that the commitment of large amounts of funding to move towards the goal of excellence in education, research, and academia will help to accelerate progress within the university, but funding alone will not be sufficient to achieve academic success. Attendees referred to institutions such as MIT when suggesting that there is a period of maturity that the university must go through to reach such excellence.

¶12. (C) These comments notwithstanding, the project is unprecedented in scope and potential impact as a center of scientific and engineering excellence in the Middle East. Based on collaborative relationships with eastern and western universities, an impressive, evolving curriculum and faculty, and endowed with great resources, KAUST has all the basic ingredients for success. In keeping with the Secretary's Islamic World Science Partnerships initiative, post will continue to follow KAUST's progress carefully.

GFOELLER